

## **PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS PERCEIVED SUCCESS OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

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*One purpose of this study was to determine types of behaviors pre-service teachers viewed as inappropriate classroom behaviors. Secondly, the researchers examined the perceived success of classroom management strategies reported by pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers were teaching in junior and senior high school classrooms in the areas of family and consumer sciences education, business education and industrial technology education.*

*Results indicated that talking, disruptive behavior, disrespect, inattention, and not doing/refusal to do assigned work accounted for the majority of the responses when identifying behavior problems. The most successful strategy reported in handling discipline behavior problems was verbal reprimand and the least successful strategy reported was ignoring the behavior. Implications for teacher education are discussed.*

*My 4th period Workplace Readiness class would not quit talking throughout the entire period. After many scoldings I finally gave up and sat at my desk. I didn't talk the rest of the period because I thought I might break down and cry." -Pre-service teacher (Week 3)*

Classroom management is commonly referred to as the application of standards set in the classroom for positive student behavior. Classroom management has been identified as a critical skill for beginning teachers and pre-service (student) teachers (Armstrong & Savage, 1990).

A major concern of pre-service and beginning teachers is classroom management. Brock and Grady (1996) found classroom management and discipline were consistently ranked as major problems by beginning teachers and principals. Lack of student discipline and classroom management organizational skills were identified by pre-service teachers as areas that did not go well during student teaching (Rancifer, 1992). Stress related to classroom management was the most influential factor in failure among novice teachers in a study of classroom management strategies in the Chicago public schools (Greenlee & Ogletree, 1993). Gibbons and Jones (1994) found that novice teachers reported that in the early stages of their placement their concerns were primarily content-oriented, while toward the end their concerns were about classroom management.

Adler (1996) found that classroom management is a major concern of pre-service and beginning teachers. She suggests that such concerns can override efforts to promote reflective inquiry. Thomas and Kiley (1994) also found that first-year teachers' concerns tend to focus more on classroom management and discipline.

## **Design of the Study**

One purpose of this study was to determine types of behaviors pre-service teachers viewed as inappropriate classroom behaviors. Secondly, the researchers examined the perceived success of classroom management strategies reported by pre-service teachers.

This study began in 1991 and ended in 1996. During this period, 48 pre-service teachers completed the teacher certification program at the University of Arkansas in the area of Vocational Education. All pre-service teachers were invited to participate in this study of classroom management techniques by completing an open-ended questionnaire during the 12 weeks of the student teaching experience. They were asked to identify those classroom behavior problems they were experiencing as well as to document how they addressed the behavior and how well they believed they handled the problems. The open-ended questionnaire was comprised of two statements: "This week, I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way" and "This week, I handled this discipline problem least successfully by reacting in this way." The pre-service teachers were asked to write a weekly entry in response to each statement.

A total of 46 or 96% of the pre-service teachers agreed to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire. The pre-service teachers were in the vocational areas of family and consumer sciences education, business education, and industrial technology education. All completed their professional education courses at the University of Arkansas during the semester prior to entering student teaching. Each pre-service teacher received 4-6 hours of instruction related to classroom management in their methods courses.

The pre-service teachers completed their student teaching experience in vocational programs in public schools in Northwest Arkansas. Forty-four were placed in senior high schools and two were placed in junior high schools. The pre-service teachers were placed with cooperating teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience. The schools were located in rural communities with class sizes ranging from 15 - 30 students. After one week of observation, the pre-service teachers assumed teaching responsibilities for one class each week until they were teaching all classes during the day. The pre-service teachers completed the open-ended questionnaire on a weekly basis.

Although the information on the questionnaires was confidential, the supervising teacher, university supervisor, and pre-service teacher discussed classroom incidents in observation conferences.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions to be answered were the following:

1. What types of behavior do pre-service teachers perceive as problems in the classroom?
2. What classroom management strategies were identified as most successful and least successful by pre-service teachers?

## **Methodology**

Over five years, 46 pre-service teachers participated in the study. The sample consisted of 9 family and consumer sciences education, 35 business education, and 2 industrial technology education pre-service teachers.

An open-ended questionnaire was used to record the data. Each pre-service teacher was given 12 questionnaires to be completed during the 12 weeks of student teaching. Some students

did not report any behavior problems for the week and some reported more than one behavior on a single questionnaire.

Missing questionnaires were not included in the analysis of data. Missing questionnaires resulted when pre-service teachers did not turn in a questionnaire for one or more weeks.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was used to analyze the questionnaire entries. Content analysis is an objective and systematic technique to describe the content of any form of communication. In education, content analysis is aimed at producing descriptive information by answering questions directly related to the material analyzed and identifying educational problems (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Forty-six sets of questionnaire entries comprised the data for this study. During the time the students were in the classroom setting, the researchers did not read the entries since they were supervising the student teaching experiences of the pre-service teachers. The average length of a weekly entry was one page. Entries were entered into the computer using QSR Nud\*ist 4 (1997) software. QSR Nud\*ist 4 (1997) software (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) is used to analyze data by documenting patterns or clusters of occurrences of keywords in the data. It searches for words and phrases in the text of documents and indexes the results.

Text from entries was examined for descriptors of classroom incidents that pre-service teachers perceived as problems and what classroom management strategy was employed as they reacted to the incident. Examples of major categories of problems were talking, disruptive behavior, disrespect and inattention. Examples of classroom management strategies identified, as how they reacted to the problem were verbal reprimand and ignoring the behavior.

The researchers validated the findings of the study by reading each entry to verify the cluster or patterns of occurrences identified by QSR Nud\*ist 4 (1997) and to code additional problems and strategies not documented by QSR Nud\*ist 4. The data were summarized through the use of frequencies. The information reported here are the thoughts of pre-service students about classroom behavior and strategies, not that of the researchers.

### **Results of the Study**

Talking, disruptive behavior, disrespect, inattention, and not doing/refusal to do assigned work accounted for 333 (74%) of the 450 responses when identifying behavior problems. All behaviors and strategies are presented in [Table 1](#).

The most successful strategy reported in handling behavior problems was verbal reprimand (68, 25%). Other successful strategies reported in rank order are listed in [Table 2](#). As shown in [Table 3](#), ignoring the behavior was the least successful strategy in handling behavior problems. Ignoring the behavior was mentioned 67 (35%) times and verbal reprimand was mentioned 66 (34%) times as least successful.

Many pre-service teachers reported the same strategy as the most successful while others saw it as the least successful way to handle the behavior. Verbal reprimand, ignoring the behavior, and taking students to the office were identified as both most successful and least successful strategies. In the opinion of the researchers, the pre-service teacher's reality was what was happening at the moment. They often dealt with the immediate problem and did not consider the history and personality style of the students, nor did they consider the circumstances leading to the problem. Most often if their reaction solved the problem, they identified it as most

successful; however, if the same strategy did not stop the problem, it was identified as least successful.

Below are two examples of how one student reported a strategy as most successful while another reported that same strategy as the least successful way to address a behavior. Both pre-service teachers responded to a behavior with a verbal reprimand. In describing a successful way to handle a behavior problem, one student wrote:

*“There was a student that was talking while my other ‘team’ teacher was giving her lecture. Instead of going over and asking him to be quiet I just yelled his name out and told him to ‘tone it down!’ Later, I told the student that I felt it was rude of him to be talking while others were talking. He understood and I didn’t have any other problems with him.” (Week 1)*

In the second example, verbal reprimand was also used but the pre-service teacher identified it as a least successful way to handle a behavior problem.

*“I raised my voice to a girl and I guess she didn't expect that because she got real defensive and talked back to me. She wouldn't let me explain why I was mad so then I had to raise my voice to talk over her. I should've just told her to be quiet and listen.” (Week 3)*

### **Classroom Behavior Problems**

The study of the pre-service teachers found (1) talking, (2) disruptive behavior, (3) disrespect, (4) inattention and (5) not doing/refusal to do assigned work as the most frequently reported classroom management behavior problems.

Other behaviors identified by pre-service teachers as inappropriate ranged from minor offenses such as gum chewing to serious problems such as vandalism and fighting ([see Table 1](#)). This shows the variety of problems encountered in a classroom. Some problems are the result of enforcing school rules and structures-cutting/skipping/leaving class, tardy, grading systems, dress code, smoking, and tobacco. Others reflect problems of teen culture - profanity, fighting, and racial slurs. Others reflect the teachers expectations and the classroom environment - inappropriate use of equipment, cheating, sleeping, not bringing required materials to class, clean up, eating, and chewing gum.

#### Talking

Talking was mentioned 135 (30%) times from a total of 450 responses ([see Table 4](#)). Descriptors were talking, talk too much while working, being loud, excessive talking, talkative, whisper, giggle, socializing, griping, and chattering.

Verbal reprimand was reported 27 (20%) times as the most successful strategy to deal with students talking. Separation (17, 13%) was frequently reported as a successful strategy for talking ([see Table 4](#)).

The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates how a pre-service teacher described his or her most successful strategy for addressing talking: "This week I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way . . ."

*"I have six students in one of my classes that are constantly talking and acting up. I first gave them a verbal warning, and secondly proceeded to separate them. I think it is going to work." (Week 3)*

Verbal reprimand (25, 19%) was also found to be the least successful way to deal with students talking followed by ignoring the behavior (13, 10%) (see Table 4). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates how a pre-service teacher described his or her least successful strategy for addressing talking.

*"This week I handled this discipline problem least successful by reacting in this way . . ." "Student disregarded direct request for no talking and even asked for a larger penalty. My tone of voice in reply was not appropriate." (Week 1)*

The most successful strategy mentioned for talking was verbal reprimand.

Verbal reprimand was also found to be the least successful strategy. The opinion of the authors was if the verbal reprimand led to a change in behavior, the verbal reprimand was perceived by the pre-service teachers as a successful strategy. Conversely, if there was no change in behavior, then the pre-service teachers perceived verbal reprimand as a least successful strategy.

### Disruptive Behavior

As noted in Table 4, disruptive behavior was mentioned 83 (18%) times out of a total 450 responses for the five-year period. Descriptors for disruptive behavior were rowdy, moving around in chair, throwing paper, constantly walking around room, playing with equipment, constantly leaning back in chair, horse play, and hyper.

The most successful strategy reported for disruptive behavior was verbal reprimand (13, 16%) (see Table 4). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates responses from a pre-service teacher when describing the problem and his or her most successful strategy for disruptive behavior.

*"This week I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way . . ." "A boy in my 4<sup>th</sup> period class proceeded to roll his chair out into the hall to visit with friends. I quietly told him to please move himself back into the classroom NOW! He did (no other problems with him the rest of the class)." (Week 10)*

As noted in Table 4, ignoring the behavior was found to be the least successful way to deal with disruptive behavior (11, 13%) followed by verbal reprimand (10, 12%). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates how a pre-service teacher described his or her least successful strategy for addressing disruptive behavior.

*"This week I handled this discipline problem least successfully by reacting in this way . . ." "Boys in 5<sup>th</sup> hour class were being rowdy and rolling around in their desks on Wednesday. I told them, repeatedly, to quit doing that, but they kept on. I ended up ignoring them. They would not listen." (Week 9)*

## Disrespect

Disrespect was mentioned 54 (12%) times from a total of 450 responses for the five-year period (see Table 4). Descriptors were student acting like teacher wasn't there, disregarding direct request from teacher, talking back, and rude comments.

*“This week I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way . . .” “Again I had a video camera set up to record group projects and some students were hamming it up. I told them that this was serious business and that in the real world a presentation given like that would get them fired. ‘But we are not doing this for pay.’ My retort was that yes they were -- their grades were their pay.” (Week 6)*

Ignoring the behavior (15, 28%) was the least successful way to deal with disrespect in the classroom (see Table 4). Verbal reprimand (8, 15%) was frequently identified as an unsuccessful strategy. The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates a response from a pre-service teacher describing his or her least successful strategy when addressing disrespect.

*“This week I handled this discipline problem least successfully by reacting in this way . . .” “I told a girl to put away her fingernail polish and she didn't. Instead of making her -- I let her finish and then put it away. I don't think this was good for the rest of the class to see. I need to be seen as legitimate -- and serious and having authority to enforce rules.” (Week 9)*

## Inattention

As noted in [Table 4](#), inattention was mentioned 31 (7%) times by the pre-service teachers. Descriptors for inattention were not paying attention, writing notes, and doing homework from another class. Discussing the problem (3, 10%) was listed as the most successful strategy to deal with inattention in the classroom ([see Table 4](#)). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates a response from a pre-service teacher describing his or her most successful strategy when addressing inattention.

*“This week I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way . . .” “A boy was having problems paying attention in class so I asked to speak to him when the class was doing written work. I found out that the problem was a personal one that involved him not having the confidence to pursue his goal. I tried to tell him that he was the only one who would know when the time was right to pursue his goal. The afternoon hour, he came to another class and told me that he went out on a limb and asked. It worked and he's going to the prom with a date.” (Week 1)*

As shown in [Table 4](#), verbal reprimand (10, 32%) was listed as the least successful way to deal with inattention followed by discussing the problem (6, 19%). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates a response from a pre-service teacher describing his or her least successful strategy when addressing inattention.

"This week I handled this discipline problem least successfully by reacting in this way . . ." *"A student began to fall asleep in class. The cooperating teacher asked the student to go to the nurse's office if he can't stay awake in class. The students generally perk up. I had a student drift off today in Office Procedures. I tried the same methodology. It failed. The student just looked at me and closed his eyes again. I told him to pay attention. He never fully participated."* (Week 5)

#### Not Doing/Refusal to Do Assigned Work

Not doing/refusal to do assigned work was mentioned 30 (7%) times out of 450 responses (see Table 4). Taking the student to the office (3, 10%) was reported as the most successful strategy (see Table 4). The following quotation taken from a selected questionnaire illustrates a response from a pre-service teacher when describing his or her most successful strategy.

"This week I handled this discipline problem most successfully by reacting in this way . . ." *"I had a student refuse to do what I had told the class to do. So, I walked over to her desk and told her to quit messing with her computer and to read the second page handout. She threw the handout and said she would not do what I said. So, I wrote a note and sent the student to the principal's office. She returned with a note from the principal and then apologized to me."* (Week 10)

Deducting points (3, 10%) was reported as being the least successful strategy in addressing not doing/refusal to do assigned work (see Table 4). The following quotation from a selected questionnaire illustrates a response from a pre-service teacher when describing his or her least successful strategy in addressing not doing/refusal to do assigned work.

"This week I handled this discipline problem least successfully by reacting in this way . . ." *"With about 20 minutes remaining in the class, I noticed one of the students working at her desk who had not handed in her assignment. I asked her why she didn't hand in her work; she said she hadn't done it. I told her she had time left in the class today to finish it. She shook her head in agreement but never went to her computer to finish her assignment. I gave her a zero for the assignment but I should have told her to do her work or sent her to the office."* (Week 5)

### **Discussion and Implications for Teacher Education**

Findings in this study are similar to that of Greenlee and Ogletree (1993) concerning the effect of teachers' attitudes on student discipline problems and classroom management strategies. In their study of the Chicago public schools, the four most frequently occurring discipline problems identified were (1) disrespect for fellow students, (2) disinterest in school, (3) lack of attention, and (4) excessive talking.

In this study, the behaviors were often influenced by a lack of planning and preparation as well as an inability to create an environment for student learning. This is one of the few entries that acknowledge that lack of planning was the cause of the behavior problems:

*“I wasn't stern enough with my 2<sup>nd</sup> period keyboarding class. They got done early. There are only 3 girls in my class and the rest are boys. If I don't keep them busy they get a little rowdy. I should have had more planned.”* (Week 9)

The pre-service teachers did not experience serious classroom management problems created by societal or external influences. However, two incidences were reported by pre-service teachers of students fighting.

The pre-service teachers were not asked to discuss reasons for misbehavior but many of their strategies were not compatible to the behavior, which suggest they did not see the relationship between the behaviors and their own classroom practices, preparation, and ability to communicate effectively. Rather than addressing how they could change their classroom practices the pre-service teachers seemed to respond by addressing behaviors. If confronted with behaviors that they did not understand, they simply ignored the situation.

The number of different strategies used to address each behavior showed a lack of consistency in classroom management. The pre-service teachers seemed unable to consistently use the same classroom management technique to address specific behavior problems.

Findings suggest that pre-service teachers are not engaging in reflective inquiry in classroom management. It appeared to the researchers that the pre-service teachers' strategies remained the same throughout the 12 weeks. This study suggests that most often, pre-service teachers react to behaviors rather than reflecting on the cause of the problem. Here is one example of such a journal entry.

*“I used mass punishment with one of my classes and made them do bookwork on a module day. Really, only a certain few were acting poorly in class.”* (Week 9)

Beach and Pearson (1998) found pre-service teachers' “strategies for coping with conflict and tension shifted from avoidance to expedient survival strategies to interrogation of their personal theories of teaching” (p. 337) as they became more aware of the complexity of teaching by reflecting in journals and small group sessions.

It appears from the findings of this study that pre-service teachers need more preparation in classroom management. In a study by DelGesso and Smith (1993), student teachers felt that classroom management was neglected in their teacher preparation program and asked that techniques in classroom management be incorporated in the methods classes. Britt (1997) found that beginning teachers voiced a need for more courses in classroom management and discipline because their pre-service training had not prepared them for the demands of teaching. A study by Kelly, Stetson, and Stetson (1997) recommended more emphasis on classroom management for both field-based year-long internships and the traditional semester student teaching experience. Gilberts and Lignugaris-Kraft (1997) recommend a core of classroom management knowledge and practices as part of a foundation for teacher professional development.

Pre-service teachers also need more mentoring programs (Farnsworth & Morris, 1995). Brock and Grady (1996) reported the need for a year-long induction program that included mentoring programs with careful selection, assignment, and training of mentors. A mentoring program should assist the pre-service teacher with any problems or concerns he or she may have. “In fact, the most effective mentors will readily admit that they have learned as much, if not more, from their protégés as the protégés have from them” (Farnsworth & Morris, 1995, p. 140).

Charnock and Kiley (1995) conducted a study to identify what beginning high school and middle school teachers found were their most valuable types of assistance. A teacher serving as a mentor and having a colleague to observe a class were two types of assistance found to be the most valuable.

### **Value of the Research**

The problems identified in this study reflect the current attitudes of pre-service teachers and how they approach problems differently than experienced teachers. Examples discussed in this study can help mentor teachers see how problems are perceived by pre-service teachers.

In teacher preparation programs, the examples in this study can be used as case studies to initiate discussion regarding ways to handle a variety of classroom management problems. For example, improper ways of dealing with specific classroom management problems in this study can be discussed followed by identifying the best way to resolve the problems.

The researchers believe this study should be replicated with pre-service teachers who take a classroom management course prior to entering the student teaching. In addition, the survey instrument should be revised to allow pre-service teachers the opportunity for in-depth reflection regarding classroom behaviors.

It would be worthwhile to examine the types of classroom management strategies employed by pre-service teachers in a year-long induction program. As teacher education programs change and the role and expectations of mentor teachers expand, pre-service teachers will be expected to be better managers of the classroom environment.

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Table 1

*Rank Order of Classroom Management Behaviors and Strategies As Reported by Vocational Education Student Teachers*

Order	Behavior	Number of Times Mentioned	Percent of Times Reported	Most Successful Strategy Reported	Least Successful Strategy Reported
1	Talking	135	30%	Verbal reprimand	Verbal reprimand
2	Disruptive	83	18%	Verbal reprimand	Ignored behavior
3	Disrespect	54	12%	Verbal reprimand	Ignored behavior
4	Inattention	31	7%	Discuss problem	Verbal reprimand
5	Not doing/Refusal to do assigned work	30	7%	Took to office	Deducted points
6	Cutting/Skipping/Leaving class	20	4%	Detention	Ignored behavior
7	Inappropriate use of equipment	14	3%	Detention	Verbal reprimand
8	Cheating	13	3%	Gave a ?0?	Verbal reprimand Ignored behavior
8	Questioning grading system	13	3%	Discuss problem	Argue with student
9	Tardy	12	3%	Argue with student	Ignored behavior
10	Profanity	11	2%	Verbal reprimand Wake up offender	Ignored behavior
11	Sleeping	9	2%	Ask offender questions	Ignored behavior
12	Smoking	7	2%	Took to office Ignored behavior	Verbal reprimand
13	Dress code violation	4	1%	Explain rules Verbal reprimand	Took to office Ignored behavior
14	Not bringing required materials to class	3	1%	Contract Provide materials	Verbal reprimand
15	Clean up	2	-	Verbal reprimand	Verbal reprimand
15	Vandalism	2	-	Have student clean up	None
15	Eating	2	-	Ignored behavior	Separation
15	Fighting	2	-	Verbal reprimand Took to office	None
16	Tobacco	1	-	Took to office	None
16	Chewing gum	1	-	None	Assign extra work
16	Racial slur	1	-	Took to office	None
	Total	450	98%		

Table 2

*Rank Order of the Most Successful Strategies Reported in Handling Behavior Problems*

Order	Classroom Management Strategy	Number of Responses	Percentage
1	Verbal reprimand	68	25%
2	Separation	22	8%
3	Discuss problem with student	20	7%
4	Take student to office	19	7%
5	Ignored behavior	15	6%
	Other	127	47%

Note. N=271; Other strategies mentioned one or two times on the questionnaires included such strategies as confiscate materials, assist student with personal problems, ask offender to get on task, advise students to do other work after class, and call parents.

Table 3

*Rank Order of the Least Successful Strategies Reported in Handling Behavior Problems*

1	Ignored behavior	67	35%
2	Verbal reprimand	66	34%
3	Argued with students	11	6%
4	Take student to office	6	3%
5	Eliminate source of problem	5	3%
	Other	39	19%

Note. N=194; Other strategies mentioned one or two times on the questionnaires included such strategies as walk out of class, name on board, busy work, cleaning, and work sheets.

Table 4

*Summary of Most Reported Behavior Problems, Most Successful and Least Successful Strategies*

Behavior	N*	%	Most Successful Strategy	N*	%	Least Successful Strategy	N*	%
Talking	135	30	Verbal reprimand	27	30	Verbal reprimand	25	19
			Separation	17	13	Ignored behavior	13	10
			Other **	91	67	Other **	97	71
Disruptive	83	18	Verbal reprimand	13	16	Ignored behavior	11	13
			Other **	70	84	Verbal reprimand	10	12
						Other **	62	75
Disrespect	54	12	Verbal reprimand	12	22	Ignored behavior	15	28
			Ignored behavior	6	11	Verbal reprimand	8	15
			Other **	36	67	Other **	31	57
Not doing/Refusal to do assigned work	30	7	Took to office	3	10	Deducted points	3	10
			Other **	27	90	Other **	27	90

Note. \*N=Number of times mentioned. \*\*Other behaviors and strategies were mentioned but did not represent a majority.